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Because of the far-reaching implications of the problems of the underachiever, it was sought to determine whether group counseling on a long-term basis would have any positive effect. Students chosen were in the top 25% in aptitude, with grade averages considerably below the mean. A control and an experimental group were chosen. It was hypothesized that change would be in the direction of higher grade point averages. Changes were also measured in self-concept, teacher attitudes, attendance patterns and behavior, and study skills. The sessions took place once a week over a two-year period. The evaluation at the end of four semesters indicated that grades and study habits did not change either on the absolute level or in comparison with the control group. Teacher ratings showed that the experimental group improved, and fewer absences were noted. The control group worsened in the psychological areas of responsibility, equalization, and maturity. The psychological inventory indicated an increase in poise, self-confidence, and in the capacity for independent thought and action for the experimental group. Although the problem of poor grades was unsolved, the evaluation and the opinions of students, parents, and the counseling staff indicate that group counseling was a positive and beneficial experience. A partial follow-up study of these pupils on a long-term basis in terms of vocational, personal, and educational goals will be undertaken.							
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GROUP COUNSELING FOR GIFTED UNDER-ACHIEVING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
IN
SEQUOIA UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Because of the far reaching implications of the problems of the under-achiever in school and in the community, the Sequoia Union High School District decided to work with able pupils to determine whether group counseling on a long-term basis would have any positive effect on certain factors which appear to be important in this under-achieving. NDEA funds were made available on this 3-year study and the first year of work involved pilot work and planning for the final research design.

The procedure involved follows: From the sophomore students in all six high schools of the Sequoia Union High School District who took the Differential Aptitude Test battery, those students with a Verbal-Numerical score above the 75th percentile were selected as the academically able population. Students with a grade point average below the mean of this designated group were classified as scholastic under-achievers. Two groups, one experimental (52 girls, and 40 boys) and one a control (42 girls and 58 boys) were randomly selected. Eight like-sexed counseling groups averaging 12 students each were formed in four high schools. These groups were lead by counselors with at least a year of training in group work and they had regular consultations during the two-year experience. Groups met once a week from November 1960 through May of 1962. All group work was done during the school day with the period for which the pupil was called rotating from first through sixth hour. This then meant that he must miss only one in thirty academic meetings of a particular subject matter area.

In addition to the group counseling certain instruments were also used for evaluation and indication of change. These included the California Study Methods Survey, a Student

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Behavior Questionnaire and the California Psychological Inventory. These instruments were administered to the experimental and control groups at the beginning and at the end of the study. Further evaluative criteria involved were school attendance, tardy records, referrals to the deans and grade point averages.

The control groups during this period of time received the same kind of statistical and test attention as the experimental group, but at no time were they involved in group counseling. They followed a regular pattern of individual counseling on a demand basis within the school as do all pupils.

In each instance it was hypothesized that change would be in the direction of higher grade point averages following counseling for the two-year period; changes in self-concept as measured by the California Psychological Inventory; changes in teacher attitudes as measured by the Student Behavior Questionnaire; changes in attendance patterns and behavior within the school; and changes in the area of study skills--all favoring greater positive movement for the experimental groups. The Student Behavior Questionnaire, which is a teacher rating form, was developed within the district as a way to assess the teacher's concept of pupil behavior. This instrument was completed by six teachers of all pupils in the study four times during the total experience.

All of the pupils who participated in this study were invited to do so, and it was made their responsibility to report this program to their parents. Then on parents' request, counselors handling the experimental groups met with their parents to go over the program. This was the only home contact. Few such requests were received.

Generally, all pupils appeared at the initial counseling session, and depending on the

leadership and the general group chemistry, pupils remained in their original setting. One group maintained its full personnel of leader and pupils for the duration of the two-year study. Other groups had leader changes due to personnel transfers. However, at no time were pupils added to the groups who had not been in the original random selection of those who would be called "controls" and "experimentals".

It should be pointed out here that the counselors involved in the study were part of a five-year counselor training program. The initial responsibility involved administrators, counselors and teachers. Then counselors who evidenced a particular interest in group work were asked to participate in this program. It is interesting to note that two administrators, two psychologists, and four counselors carried these groups over the period of two years. Dr. Van Dalsem and Dr. Finney served as consultants on a scheduled basis for the group leaders.

At the end of four semesters of work the two groups were compared. First, grades which appear to be most resistant to change did not change, either in difference between the two groups or at the absolute level. Study habits also did not change.

The teachers' observations however, as indicated by the Student Behavior Questionnaire, indicated significant improvement in the counseling group. They rated the counseling group "improved" on eleven of the thirty-three questions on the questionnaire. These included improvement in willingness to ask for help, to accept suggestions and to pay attention in class. The teachers too judged the experimental group to be less disruptive in class, less resistive to assignments, tardy and absent less, less likely to put off doing their work and they were also classified as seeming to "enjoy learning more for its own sake".

Now, there is a possibility that these results reflect only the optimism of the teacher, since they did know which pupils were in the experimental and control groups. However,

the fact that some of the items one might expect to be most sensitive to "halo" did not show improvement, such as "He had inner problems that interfere with his work or happiness". That these did not show differences suggest that evaluation truly reflects improvement in the experimental group.

To continue, the experimental group had significantly fewer absences from school. There was no significant difference in department referrals although it was suggestive that both years the number of referrals were fewer for the experimental group.

On the California Psychological Inventory the control group did significantly poorer at the end of the study on the scales measuring responsibility, socialization, and maturity. In other words, the traits they were weakest on to start with seemed to become "worse". They improved on only one scale of self-acceptance.

Comparing the groups on the differences between the beginning and the end of the study (computed for each pupil) the experimental group was significantly superior on capacity for status (the personal qualities which lead to status), sociability (outgoing and participative temperament), social presence (poise, spontaneity and self-confidence), sense of well-being, tolerance, achievement via performance (the scale associated with earning good grades in high school), achievement via independence, (the scale associated with getting better grades in college), social poise and adequacy, and capacity for independent thought and action.

It was interesting to note that group counseling did not produce increases in conformity, although it is in this area that these students appear to be "weakest". Instead, it increased their capacity for independent thought and action which was their most superior area in the beginning.

In summary then, the group counseling experience did produce some measurable changes;

changes which should be of personal and social significance. Changes that teachers observed could be generalized for the experimental group as less resistive to and more identification with adults and adult values. The psychological inventory indicated an increase in poise and self-confidence and in the capacity of independent thought and action for the experimental group. All of this then should stand them in good stead in their chosen careers in college, if one of their original and unsolved problems of poor grades doesn't keep them from going on to college.

It is the opinion of those directing the study that these "measured" differences were the result of long-term counseling as opposed to the possibility of short-term counseling. An interesting facet to this study was the fact that pupils were reluctant to give up the group experience after the two-year period, harkening back to the days when they did not see why they were there and then coming around to the point where they realized that they did have something to accomplish.

In a general discussion of this program the opinion of the students, parents who contacted counselors, and the counseling staff was that this has been a positive and beneficial experience. Not only were there measurable differences, but the attitude of those students who completed the study indicated that they would hope to have this opportunity in the future in working on other problem areas.

One of the shortcomings of this program was that a careful follow-up study should be done with these pupils in terms of vocational, personal and educational goals. The Sequoia Union High School District is in a position to do a partial follow-up, but not to do the thorough-going piece of work which would be most advantageous. However, the findings of this study are such that the district plans to continue to work with under-achieving pupils in groups on a long-term basis, seeing this approach as one possibility for positive change.